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MENNO'S

DEPARTURE FROM POPERY.

All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe *all things* whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.—THE MASTER; see Matt. xxviii. 18—20.

BX/8127/M413

PUBLISHED BY THE

BAPTIST GENERAL TRACT SOCIETY.

Tracts may be obtained at the Society's General Depository, 118 North Fourth st. Philadelphia, and of its Agents in various parts of the United States. All orders for Tracts, remittances, &c. should be addressed to the "Agent of the Baptist General Tract Society, Philadelphia."

BX
8127
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N°. 18

OF THE SERIES OF TRACTS ISSUED BY THE

Baptist General Tract Society.

MENNO'S DEPARTURE FROM POPERY.

A TRANSLATION BY IRA CHASE.

First published in the Columbian Star, May, 1825.

INTRODUCTORY LETTER ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR.

The following account of Menno's departure from Popery, has produced on my mind a deep impression. It is found among his collected works in the Dutch language, and forms a small part of the piece entitled, Een Klare Beantwoordinghe over eene Schrift Gellii Fabri,—A clear Reply to a publication of Gellius Faber. It seems to have been translated, at an early period, into the German; and in this shape it is inserted by professor Wadzeck in his lucid work on the Mennonites, recently published in Prussia. He speaks of it in terms of high commendation, as a *small, rare tract, bearing evident marks of genuineness and truth.* But with the original before me, I have needed no testimonial in its favour. In reading it I have been carried back three hundred years, to a most eventful period, and placed in the company of a man of apostolical spirit. Menno was born in Friesland, in the year 1505. Mosheim, it will be recollected, observes: "After a life of toil, peril, and agitation, he departed in peace in the year 1561, in the Dutchy of Holstein, at the country seat of a certain nobleman, not far from the city of Oldesloe, who, moved with compassion at a view of the perils to which Menno was exposed, and the snares that were daily laid for his ruin, took him, together with several associates, into his protection, and gave him an asylum."

His death occurred seven years after he wrote the Reply, containing the account which is now presented to the English reader.

The sketch, brief as it is, must excite many a sober reflection, many a grateful emotion. It is the voice of one 'of whom the world was not worthy;' of one whose dust has for ages slept in its lowly bed, but who yet speaks to the hearts of men. In this land of religious freedom, it cannot be useless to listen, now and then, to 'the sighing of the prisoners' that is heard from other nations, and other times.

Heaven grant that what is here presented may tend to cherish the spirit of primitive Christianity,—of love and obedience to Christ crucified—and impress the remembrance of the fact, in view of eternity, that 'unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required.' I submit it, dear Sir, to your disposal; happy in the confidence, that you will join most cordially in the prayer of

THE TRANSLATOR.

May 20, 1825.

ACCOUNT OF MENNO'S DEPARTURE FROM POPERY; WRITTEN BY HIMSELF, A. D. 1554.

My reader, I write you the truth in Christ, and lie not. In my twenty-fourth year I entered on the office of priest in my father's village called Pingium, where also two others, of about my age, were with me occupied in the same service. The one was my Pastor, the other was under me. These both had read the Scriptures some; but I had not in my whole life meddled with them; for I feared that by reading them I might be led astray. See, so stupid a preacher was I during two years.

The next year, whenever at mass I handled the bread and wine, the thought occurred to me, these are not literally the Lord's flesh and blood. At first, I supposed the thought came from Satan seeking to seduce me from the faith. I confessed it often with sighing, and I prayed; yet I could not be rid of this thought.

The two mentioned young men and I passed our days in sporting, drinking, and the like methods of consuming time, in all vanity, which alas! is the custom with such unfruitful

people. And when we had occasion to treat a little of the Scripture, I could not speak with them a word without scoffing; for I knew not what I meant:—so shut up was God's word from my eyes.

At last, I resolved to examine the New Testament once with diligence. I had gone in it but a little way, when I discovered that we were deceived; and my mind that had been troubled about the bread was, without any one's guidance, soon delivered from its anguish. Yet so far was Luther of service to me, as he had proved that human commands bind no man to eternal death.

Through the Lord's enlightening and grace I advanced daily in the knowledge of the Scriptures, and by some was soon called (though without good reason) an evangelical preacher. Each sought and loved me; for the world loved me, and I the world. However, it was said that I preached God's word, and was a fine man. Afterwards it happened, before I had ever heard of any *brethren*, that a devout, innocent hero, of the name of Siecke Snyder, was beheaded at Leuwarden, because, he had been re-baptized. It sounded very strange in my ears to speak of a person's being re-baptized. I examined the Scriptures with diligence, and meditated on them earnestly; but I could find in them no notice of infant baptism. As I marked this, I spake of it to my Pastor; and after many conversations, he acknowledged that infant baptism had no ground in the Scriptures. Yet I dared not trust so much to my understanding. I consulted some ancient authors, who taught me that children must by baptism be washed from their original sin. This I compared with the Scriptures, and perceived that it set at nought the blood of Christ. Afterwards I went to Luther, and would gladly have known from him the ground; and he taught me that we must baptize children on their own faith, because they are holy. This, also, I saw was not according to God's word. In the third place, I went to Bucer, who taught me that we should baptize children in order to be able the more diligently to take care of them, and bring them up in the ways of the Lord. But this, too, I saw was a groundless representation. In the fourth place, I had recourse to Bullinger, who pointed me to the covenant of circumcision; but I found, as before, that, according to the Scripture, the

practice could not stand. As I now, on every side, observed that the writers stood on grounds so very different, and each followed his own reason, I saw clearly that we were deceived with infant baptism.

Not long afterwards I was called to another village, Witmarsum, in which I was born. I went for the sake of gain, and with the desire of increasing my reputation. I spake there without spirit and love, (as is the manner of all hypocrites) and so made disciples as bad as myself: vain boasters, and frivolous talkers, who had never entered on the business of religion in earnest. And though I understood much of the Holy Scriptures, yet I consumed this knowledge with the delights of my youth in an unholy carnal life, without usefulness; and sought nothing but gain, ease, the favour of men, power, a great name and honour,—as persons such as I was, are generally accustomed to do.

See, my reader, I have, by the gracious favour of God, acquired my knowledge, as well of baptism as of the Lord's supper, through the enlightening of the Holy Spirit attendant on my much reading and contemplating the Scripture, and not through the efforts and means of seducing sects as I am accused. I trust that I write the truth, and seek no vain glory. Some men, it is true, in this matter, were of service to me; and for it I will forever thank the Lord. Meantime, as I had resided there about a year, it happened that some with baptism found their way into the place. But whence they came, and where was their home, and who in particular they were, is to me unknown; and I have not seen them in my whole life.

Afterwards appeared the Munster sect, through which many pious hearts in our region were deceived. My soul was in great trouble, for I perceived that they were zealous, and yet erred in doctrine. I set myself with what little talents I possessed in opposition, and exerted my influence in preaching and exhortation to the utmost of my ability. Twice I had a conversation with one of their leaders, once privately, the other time publicly. But my exhortation helped nothing, while I still myself was doing that which I knew was not right. The report was circulated extensively. It was said I could stop their mouths. Reference or appeal was made to me by all sorts of their

antagonists. I saw that I was the champion of the impenitent, the worldly opposers of reformation, who all had recourse to me. This gave my heart a severe blow; and I sighed and prayed to God: Lord help me, that I may not be chargeable with the sin of others. My soul was troubled; and I thought on the end, namely, though I should gain the whole world and live in it a thousand years, but at last have to bear God's punishing hand and indignation, what would it profit me.

The poor sheep that had gone astray as having no true shepherds, now collected themselves, after having suffered many cruel immolations, butcherings, and murders, into a place called Old Cloister, not far from my residence; and, alas! through the godless doctrine of Munster, against the spirit and word and example of Christ, drew in their own defence the sword which Peter was commanded by the Lord to sheathe. As this occurred, the blood of these men, though they were led into error, fell so heavily on my heart that I could not endure it, nor find rest in my soul. I considered my unholy, carnal life, and my hypocritical doctrine and idolatry, which I yet daily exhibited, though without satisfaction to myself, and even in contradiction to my conscience. I saw with my eyes that these zealous children, (though now acting on a mistaken principle) freely gave up their property and their lives for their belief; and I was one of those who had in part disclosed to some of them the papal enormities. Yet I was continuing in my careless life and acknowledged abominations, only that I might enjoy the ease of my flesh, and avoid the cross of the Lord.

These considerations so stung me to the heart, that they became intolerable. I thought by myself: I—miserable man! what am I doing? while I remain in such a state, and do not act fully according to the knowledge bestowed on me, and resign myself to the word of the Lord; and do not according to my little gift, oppose with the word of the Lord, the impenitent carnal life, and hypocrisy of the learned, as also their perverted baptism, supper, and false worship; and do not, so much as in me is, direct the inoffensive wandering sheep, (that would gladly go right, did they but know the right way)

to the true pasture of Christ. How then will the shed blood of such, though done in error, come forth against thee at the judgment of the great and Almighty God, and pronounce before Him condemnation upon thy ruined, suffering soul.

My heart within my bosom trembled. I besought my God with sighing and tears, that to me a troubled sinner he would grant the gift of his grace; that he would make in me a clean heart; that he would graciously forgive my impure conduct, and loose, vain life, through the merit of the blood of Christ; that he would endue me with wisdom, spirit, frankness, and manly fortitude, so that I might preach his worthy name and holy word unadulterated, and proclaim his truth to his praise.

I began in the name of the Lord to teach publicly from the pulpit, the doctrine of true repentance, to guide the people in the narrow path, to testify concerning sins and unchristian behaviour, and all idolatry and false worship, as also concerning baptism and the supper, according to the sense and fundamental principles of Christ, so far as I, at the time, had received grace from my God. Also I warned every man in regard to the Munster abominations, in regard to a king, to polygamy, to a worldly kingdom, to the sword, &c. most faithfully; until the great and gracious Lord, perhaps after the course of nine months, extended to me his fatherly spirit, help, and mighty hand, so that I freely abandoned at once my character, honour, and fame, which I had among men, as also my anti-christian abominations, mass, infant baptism, loose and careless life and all, and put myself willingly in all trouble and poverty under the pressing cross of Christ my Lord. In my weakness I feared God; I sought pious people, and of these I found some, though few, in good zeal and doctrine. I disputed with the perverted, and some I gained through God's help and power, and led them by his word to the Lord Christ; but the stiff-necked and obdurate I commended to the Lord.

See, my reader; thus has the gracious Lord drawn me, through the free favour of his great grace. He first stirred in my heart; he has given me a new mind; he has humbled me in his fear; he has led me from the way of

death, and, through mere mercy, has called me upon the narrow path of life into the company of the saints. To Him be praise for ever. Amen.

Perhaps a year afterwards, as I was silently employing myself on the word of the Lord, in reading and writing, there came to me six or eight persons, who were of one heart and soul with me; in their faith and life (so far as man can judge) irreproachable; separated from the world, according to the direction of the Scripture; subjected to the cross of Christ; and bearing a hearty abhorrence, not only of the Munster, but also of all worldly sects, anathematizing, and corruptions. With much kind entreaty they urged me, in the name of the pious who were agreed with them and me in one spirit and sentiment, that I would yet lay a little to heart the great, severe distress and necessities of the poor oppressed souls, (for the hunger was great, but very few were the faithful stewards) and employ the talent which, unworthy as I was, I had received from the Lord.

As I heard this, my heart was very much troubled; anguish and fearfulness surrounded me. For, on the one side, I saw my small gift, my want of erudition, my weak and bashful nature, the extremely great wickedness, wilfulness, perverse conduct, and tyranny of the world; the powerful large sects, the craftiness of many spirits, and the heavy cross which, should I begin, would not a little press me. On the other side, I saw the pitiable extreme hunger, want, and necessity of the devout pious children; for I perceived clearly enough that they erred as the simple forsaken sheep when they have no shepherd.

At last, after much prayer, I resigned myself to the Lord and his people, with this condition: They were for a length of time, to unite with me in praying to Him fervently, that, should it be his holy pleasure to employ me in this service to his praise, his fatherly kindness would then give me such a heart and mind, as would testify to me with Paul, *Wo is me, if I preach not the Gospel;* but should his will be otherwise, that he would order such means as to permit the matter to rest where it was. For Christ says: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

See, my reader; thus I am not of the Munster, nor of any other seditious sect, as I am calumniated; but of a people called, though unworthy, to this service; who were willing to follow Christ and his word; who, in the fear of their God, led a penitent life; who served their neighbour in love; who bore the cross patiently; who sought the health and welfare of all men; who loved righteousness and truth; and who abominated unrighteousness and iniquity. This character which they exhibit is a strong and living proof that they are not such perverted schismatics as they are accused of being; but, however unknown to the world, are true Christians, only they believe that the word of Christ is to be trusted, and that his irreproachable holy life and example are infallible and right. A great sinner as I have been, I am enlightened of the Lord, converted to a new mind, fled from Babylon, removed to Jerusalem, and arrived at last to this high and difficult service.

As now the above mentioned persons ceased not from their entreaty, and also my own conscience urged me while I saw the great hunger and need that have been intimated, I gave up myself to the Lord with body and soul, and commended myself to his gracious hand, and began at his time, according to his holy word, to teach and to baptize; with my little ability to labour in his field; to build up his holy city and temple, and to raise again the fallen stones. And, through our feeble service, teaching, and simple writing, with the careful deportment, labour, and help of our faithful brethren, the great and mighty God has made so known and public, in many cities and lands, the word of true repentance, the word of his grace and power, together with the wholesome use of his holy sacraments, and has given such growth to his churches, and endued them with such invincible strength, that not only many proud stout hearts have become humble, the impure chaste, the drunken temperate, the covetous liberal, the cruel kind, the godless godly, but also for the testimony which they bear, they faithfully give up their property to confiscation, and their bodies to torture and to death,—as has occurred again, and again, to the present hour.

These can be no fruits nor marks of false doctrine;

(with that God does not co-operate) nor under such oppression and misery could any thing have stood so long were it not the power and word of the Almighty. Indeed, what is yet more, there is bestowed in these trials so much grace and wisdom (as Christ promised to all his: Luke xxi. 15.) that all the world's learned and celebrated masters, with all the blood-guilty tyrants who, O God, forgive them! boast that they are Christians, must stand vanquished and ashamed, before these unconquerable heroes and pious witnesses of Christ, so that they neither have nor know any other weapon and escape than banishing, seizing, torturing, murdering, and destroying, agreeably to the custom of the old serpent from the beginning,—as yet, in many places in our Netherlands, may daily, alas! be seen and traced.

See, this is our calling, doctrine, and fruit of our service, for which we are so horribly calumniated, and persecuted with so much enmity. Whether all the prophets, apostles, and true servants of God, did not through their service also produce the like fruits, we would gladly let all the pious judge.

But as to my own poor, weak, and imperfect life, I freely acknowledge that I am a ruined, miserable offender, and by nature sinful. I say with David, "My sin is ever before me." My thoughts, words, and works convict me. I mark and see with Paul that "in my flesh dwelleth no good thing." Yet this I can boast in my infirmity: Were the wicked and profligate world to hear with patience our doctrine (which indeed is not ours, but the Lord Christ's) and be willing humbly to follow it in the pure fear of God, it would most certainly be a far more Christian and a far better world than, alas! it now is.

I thank my God who has given me the grace that with Paul, I hate sin, and desire holiness, and wish cordially that, even were it with my blood, I might deliver the whole world from their sinful state, and win them to Christ; that I might fear my God with my whole heart, love, seek, and serve him, do right and well before his eyes, and be a blameless, pious Christian. This in his grace is my whole desire. I hope also through the Lord's compassion and help, that no one can justly accuse me either of covetous

ness or of extravagance. Gold and riches I have not, and desire not. Some out of perverse hearts say, that I eat more of *roasted* than they of *boiled*, and drink more of wine than they of beer. My Lord and master Jesus Christ had to be treated by the perverse as a wine-bibber and a glutton. I trust through his grace, that in this respect, I am clear and innocent before my God. He who bought me with the blood of his love, and called me to his service, unworthy as I am, searches me, and knows that I seek neither gold and goods, nor luxury, nor ease on earth, but only my Lord's glory, my salvation, and the souls of many immortals. Wherefore I have had, now the eighteenth year, to endure so excessive anxiety, oppression, trouble, sorrow, and persecution, with my poor, feeble wife and little offspring, that I have stood in jeopardy of my life and in many a fear. Yes, while the priests lie on soft beds and cushions, we must hide ourselves commonly in secret corners. While they at all nuptials and christenings, and other times, make themselves merry in public with fifes, drums, and various kinds of music, we must look out for every dog, lest he be one employed to catch us. Instead of being greeted by all as doctors and masters, we must be called anabaptists, clandestine holders-forth, deceivers, and heretics. In short, while for their services they are rewarded, in princely style, with great emoluments and good days, our reward and portion must be fire, sword, and death.

See, my faithful reader, in such trouble, poverty, oppression and danger of death, have I performed my Lord's service undeviatingly to the present hour; and I hope, through his grace, still further to perform it to his praise, so long as I continue in this tabernacle.

What now I and my true coadjutors in this very difficult, hazardous service, have sought, or could have sought, all the well disposed may easily estimate from the work itself and its fruit. I will then humbly intreat the faithful and candid reader once more, for Jesus' sake, to receive in love this my forced acknowledgment of my enlightening, and make of it a suitable application. I have presented it out of great necessity, that the pious reader may know how it has happened, since I am on all sides calumniated and false-

ly accused, as if I were ordained and called to this service by a seditious and misleading sect. Let him that fears God, read and judge.

The following remarks by the Editor of the Columbian Star accompanied the above Tract on its publication in that paper.

The foregoing Tract is the voice of a much calumniated man, who defends his character, while he acknowledges, and deplores his sins; and amidst unrelenting oppression, exhibits piety of uncommon depth and fervour, and a meek charity towards his persecutors, worthy of the primitive martyrs.

The history of his gradual abandonment of the errors of his former creed, exemplifies, in a remarkable manner, the power of the Scriptures to enlighten and guide the honest mind, which searches them with a due dependence on the spirit of truth. The process, in the case of Menno, was gradual. The light grew brighter and stronger, till at length his delusions melted away, like the mist of the morning.

There is the fullest evidence, that his change of views and of practice was sincere. It was the result of a true conversion to God. There was no calculation of consequences. His interests, his feelings, and his habits, must all have inclined him to retain his connexion with the dominant church. There is, therefore, no colour for the injurious assertion of Mosheim, that he held a "clandestine" intercourse with the "Anabaptists," until he found it convenient to "throw off the mask." Menno asserts, that he had no communication whatever with the *Baptists*, until he had been led, by the Spirit of God, to adopt their principles. He remained, it is true, for a considerable time, a preacher in the Catholic church; but his mind was incessantly agitated. His description of his feelings, at that time, is a lively exhibition of the state of a mind, which is hesitating between the opposite suggestions of duty, inclination, interest, timidity, and self-distrust. Menno pursued the right course. He "besought his God, with sighing and tears.

that to him, a troubled sinner, he would grant the gift of his grace." The Lord heard his prayer, and soon after enabled him to put at hazard his character, honour, and fame, and to abandon his anti-christian abominations.

This tract proves, moreover, not only that Menno opposed the extravagant doctrines of those deluded men, who were engaged in the riots at Munster—for this fact his enemies have not ventured to deny—but that he was so far from seeking to acquire power and distinction as the leader of a sect, that he was with difficulty prevailed on by the Baptists, to become their pastor. His piety, zeal, abilities, and eloquence, naturally gave him the pre-eminence; and he became the leader, and in some respects, the reformer, of the Baptists in Holland.

But apart from its uses, as an historical document, this tract is valuable, as an edifying detail of Christian experience. There is a rare degree of unction in his penitent confessions, and his meek defence of his principles and conduct. It breathes the language of a heart which was no stranger to the sorrows and consolations of those holy men of former ages, who through faith and patience inherited the promises.

Menno was a man of whom the world was not worthy. The age in which he lived was, least of all fitted and disposed to do justice to his character. He espoused opinions, which not only provoked the hostility of the Catholic church, but which found little favour among the 'powerful large sects,' the Lutherans and Calvinists.

It is not surprising, therefore, that his conduct has been misunderstood, and misrepresented. We take pleasure in assisting to circulate an authentic exposition of his principles; and we offer our thanks to the translator for the service which he has rendered to us and to our readers, as well as to the interests of truth.

DISAPPOINTMENTS OFTEN BENEFICIAL.

How the Lord seems to have disappointed my calculations! But, perhaps, it is only to show that he can do things much better in his own way; as he often fulfils our best desires in the way we least expected, in order that while he comforts, he may humble us, and teach us to ascribe all the glory to Him. Rev. C. Wolfe.

1 HARK! the voice of love and mercy
Sounds aloud from Calvary!
See, it rends the rocks asunder,
Shakes the earth, and veils the sky!
"It is finish'd!"
Hear the dying Saviour cry!

2 It is finish'd!—O what pleasure
Do these charming words afford!
Heavenly blessings, without measure,
Flow to us from Christ the Lord.
It is finish'd!—
Saints, the dying words record.

3 Finish'd all the types and shadows
Of the ceremonial law!
Finish'd all that God had promis'd;
Death and hell no more shall awe.
It is finish'd!—
Saints from hence your comfort draw.

4 [Happy souls, approach the table,
Taste the soul-reviving food;
Nothing half so sweet and pleasant
As the Saviour's flesh and blood.
It is finish'd!—
Christ has borne the heavy load.]

5 Tune your harps anew, ye seraphs,
Join to sing the pleasing theme;
All in earth, and all in heaven,
Join to praise Immanuel's name.
Hallelujah!
Glory to the bleeding Lamb!

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